

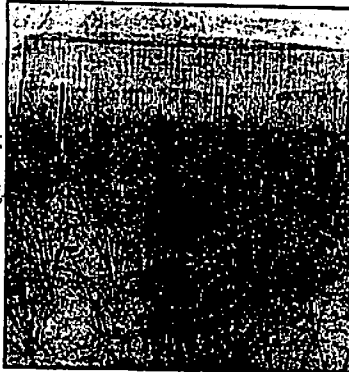
Police Search For Purloined Plovers

By LAUREN GRILLI

Officials are currently seeking information about a woman who stole four baby Piping Plovers from a crowded Duxbury Beach two weeks ago.

The endangered birds, which use their camouflage to protect themselves from predators, were stolen at approximately 2:35 p.m. on Sunday, July 10.

The plovers – a mother, father, and four babies – had made their way through the thick beach vegetation from their nest to the bay side, according to Charlie Fargo of the Duxbury Beach Reservation, Inc.



Plovers' nests lie on the dunes under enclosures like this one.

At that point, a young man, assumed to be in his teens, "was seen leaning to pick up the chicks," said Harbormaster Don Beers. He

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then handed them to an older woman, who officials presume to be his mother. Two other younger boys were also present.

When witnesses approached the woman and told her to stop, "she tucked the birds inside her shirt and took off to the resident parking lot on the East End of the beach," said Fargo. Witnesses say that the woman could not speak English.

When contacted by the witnesses, Beers said he immediately responded by dispatching all units and contacting the Massachusetts Environmental Police, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Association, and the beach's owner, the Duxbury Beach Reservation, Inc.

"We figured that she had dropped the birds once she realized the wrong she'd done," said Beers. While authorities were searching for the woman, Plover monitors scoured the beach for the four birds, but neither the woman nor the birds were found.

Since the Piping Plovers are an endangered species, they are protected at both the state and federal level. The theft of an endangered species is both a state and federal crime, and this particular crime carries a hefty fine of a possible \$25,000 per bird.

Officials believe that the woman was not a Duxbury resident. "We'd like to assume that it was someone from another town who didn't know any better," said Beers.

"The only hope is that witnesses may be able to recognize her later if she returns to the beach," said Captain Kathleen Dolan of the Coastal Enforcement Bureau

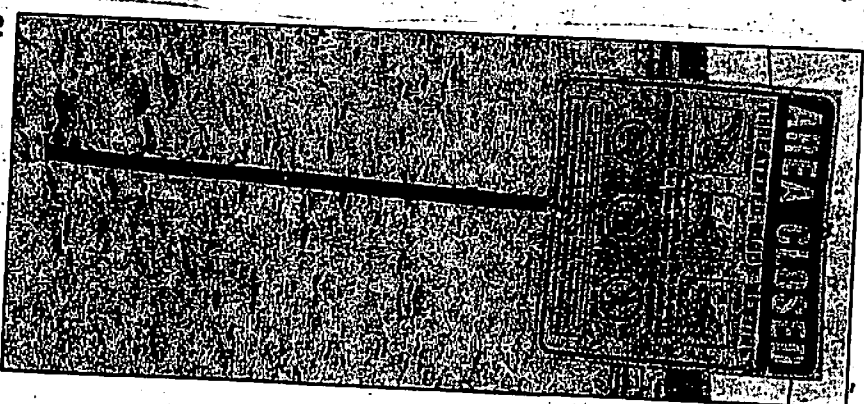
of the Massachusetts Environmental Police Department.

Why the birds were stolen is still unknown, but officials have speculated that the birds were stolen for culinary purposes. "As the investigation grew, it was brought to our attention that Piping Plovers are involved in the South American diet," said Beers.

"Plovers are a delicacy throughout South America and Latin America," said Fargo.

The police were unable to obtain a license plate number, but Police Chief Mark Deluca described the woman as a 30-year-old Hispanic woman, 5'6", 115 lbs. He described the teenager as 17 years old, 5'8", with a normal build, wearing baggy pants and a baseball cap.

Anyone with information regarding this incident should contact the Duxbury Police at 934-5656.



Signs along the beach like this one warn beachgoers of the plovers' presence.